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Congresswoman Matsui Votes Against Series of Bills to Reward Big Oil

Bills Would Reduce Safety and Oversight, Open California Coast to Drilling

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA) voted against H.R. 1229 and H.R. 1231, in addition to the vote she cast against H.R. 1230, last week. Together, these three bills brought forward by the majority party in the House of Representatives would increase domestic oil drilling by reducing review time for drilling permits and opening up the California coast to drilling. Although the intention is to free-up more oil to reduce the price at the pump, the rushed nature of these bills would dramatically jeopardize the safety of domestic drilling measures, and could lead to irreversible health and environmental damages.

In contrast, Congresswoman Matsui is a co-sponsor of H.R. 1784, the Taxpayer and Gas Price Relief Act. This common-sense legislation would authorize the President to release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in order to combat market manipulation, and make it illegal to sell gasoline at excessive prices. It would also hold Big Oil accountable by repealing the largest tax breaks for the Big Five Oil companies, and ensure that they pay the billions owed to taxpayers for drilling on public lands. This legislation would reduce the price at the pump for American families in a responsible way, without putting both lives and our oceans at risk.

“While the Republican majority attempts to make the case that increased drilling leads to lower gas prices, the truth is that the price of oil is determined at an international level, and increased domestic drilling will not have an effect on the market price in the short term,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “Instead of increasing our reliance on oil and removing the safety regulations that help protect American families, we should be taking up legislation to eliminate tax subsidies for Big Oil, who have seen record profits this year. Right now American families are subsidizing Big Oil’s record profits – first in the tax code and then at the pump – and it needs to stop. Rather than focusing on a ‘drill-only’ agenda, we should be making investments in clean energy technologies, which will reduce our dependence on oil and boost our economy

and manufacturing sector.”

Under H.R. 1231, the Interior Department would be forced to open up the outer continental shelf along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts for drilling – including right off of California’s coast, regardless of whether the state objects. Further, this bill would open these vast new areas of our coasts before the Congress has enacted a single legislative reform to improve the safety of offshore drilling. This unprecedented giveaway of new public land would occur despite the fact that oil companies currently have more than 60 million acres of public land under lease, both onshore and offshore, on which they are not producing oil. Offshore, the Department of the Interior estimates that the public land oil companies hold but are not using contains 11.6 billion barrels of oil and 59.2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

“H.R. 1231 would reverse the moratorium on California coastal drilling imposed after the devastating spill off of Santa Barbara in 1969,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “That spill taught us a lesson about the dangers of coastal drilling – and it is one we would be remiss to forget now, especially after witnessing last year’s tragic BP Oil Spill. California’s economy and ecosystem simply cannot afford the lasting effects that another spill would cause.”

H.R. 1230, which the House voted to pass last week, would order the Department of the Interior to move quickly to offer three leases to drill in the Gulf of Mexico and one off the coast of Virginia, and requires the leases to be executed by next year.

H.R. 1229 would limit the Department of the Interior’s review time for drilling permits. In fact, it would deem permits approved after sixty days, whether or not the safety and environmental review has been completed. This bill would make offshore drilling less safe, and provide less oversight for drilling, even in the wake of the BP Spill.

“It is shocking that just a year after the BP Oil Spill, Republicans in Congress are supporting legislation that would reduce oversight and review of oil drilling permits,” Matsui added. “Not only did the BP Oil Spill catastrophe damage the Gulf’s economy and environment, it also took eleven lives. It is simply irresponsible to limit the Department of Interior’s ability to review the safety of drilling permits, and will only lead to disaster.”

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